

IN THE DRAWINGS:

In Figure 2:

Please delete reference characters “3b” and the lead line therefrom.

In Figure 3:

Please delete reference characters “3b” and the lead line therefrom.

REMARKS

Summary

The Abstract, Figures 2 and 3, and Claims 4, 6-12, 15-20, and 23-26 have been amended to overcome formal objections thereto and the independent claims have each been amended to include the features of an allowable dependent claim. Therefore, the application is now in allowable form.

Status of the Claims

Claims 1-4, 6-12, 14-20, and 22-26 are pending, with Claims 1, 9, 17, 25, and 26 being independent. Claims 5, 13 and 21 have been canceled without prejudice to or disclaimer of the subject matter contained therein. Claims 4, 6-12, 15-20, and 23-26 have been amended to overcome formal objections thereto, Claims 1, 9, 17, 25, and 26 have been amended to include the features of an allowable dependent claims, and Claims 1-4, 6-12, 14-20, and 22-26 have been amended for reasons unrelated to patentability to improve their form.

Drawing Objections

The drawings are objected to because reference characters “3b” shown in Figures 2 and 3 are not discussed in the specification. In response, while not conceding the propriety of the objection, Applicants have amended Figures 2 and 3, as shown on the attached corrected formal drawings of Figures 3 and 4 to delete these reference characters therefrom, thereby rendering the objection moot. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that the drawing objections be withdrawn.

Abstract Objection

The Abstract has been objected to because it contains legal phraseology and a misspelling. In response, Applicants have amended the Abstract to overcome the objections, thereby rendering the objections moot. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that the Abstract objections be withdrawn.

Formal Claim Objections

Claims 4 and 6-24 are objected to for minor informalities in Claims 4, 6-12, 15-20, and 23-26. The Examiner makes specific suggestions for overcoming the objections. In response, while not conceding the propriety of the objections, Claims 4, 6-12, 15-20, and 23-26 have been amended to address the points raised by the Examiner and to adopt the Examiner's suggested amendments, thereby rendering the objections moot. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that the claim objections be withdrawn.

Specification Amendments

The Examiner requests that the specification be checked to eliminate all possible minor errors. In response, Applicants have reviewed and amended the specification to correct minor and typographical errors therein and to improve the form of the specification.

Additional Claim Amendments

Applicants have also amended Claims 1-4, 6-12, 14-20, and 22-26 to correct minor and typographical errors therein and to improve their form.

Allowable Subject Matter

Applicants gratefully acknowledge the indication that dependent Claims 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21, 23 and 24 contain allowable subject matter. In response, each of the independent claims has been amended to include the features of one of allowable dependent Claims 5, 13, and 21, thereby rendering all of the claims in the case allowable.

Substantive Rejections

Claims 1, 2, 6, 9, 10, 14, 17, 18, 22, 25 and 26 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a), as being unpatentable over the patent to Suwa et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,646,718) in view of the publication to Yamaoka et al. (U.S. Patent Application Publication No. US2004/0121162 A1). In addition, Claims 4, 12, and 20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a), as being unpatentable over the patent to Suwa et al. in view of the patent to Hespenheide (U.S. Patent No. 3,717,409).

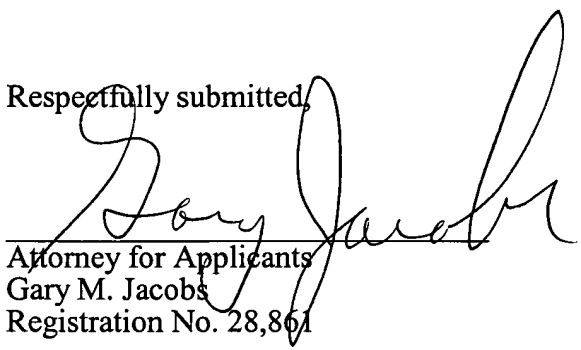
In response, while not conceding the propriety of the rejections, independent Claims 1, 9, 17, 25, and 26 have been amended to include the features of one of allowable dependent claims 5, 13, and 21, thereby rendering the rejections moot. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request that the outstanding rejections be withdrawn.

Conclusion

In view of the above amendments and remarks, the application is now in allowable form. Therefore, early passage to issue is respectfully solicited.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below-listed address.

Respectfully submitted,



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